



Fairfax County Health Department

Fact Sheet

Radon in Fairfax County

What is Radon?

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is colorless, odorless, and tasteless. It is produced by the breakdown of uranium in soil, rock and water.

How Does Radon Get Into My Home?

Radon enters homes most commonly through:

- cracks in foundations and walls;
- openings around sump pumps and drains;
- construction joints;
- crawl spaces; and
- in some cases, from well water.

Radon is usually most concentrated in the lowest level of the home. Radon may also be present in well water and can be released into the air in your home when water is used for showering and other household uses. Radon entering homes through water may be a small risk compared to radon entering through the soil.

Is Radon Really A Problem?

The Surgeon General, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Academy of Sciences, the American Medical Association, the World Health Organization and the American Lung Association have all identified indoor radon as a national health problem. Because houses next door to each other can have very different levels of radon, the only way to know if your house has an elevated radon level is to test. EPA recommends that the air in all homes and apartments below the third floor be tested. Test kits are available at most home improvement stores.

Is Radon A Problem In Drinking Water Supplies?

Radon can enter a home through well water. It can be released into indoor air when the water is run. Generally, radon is not a concern with public drinking water systems, where the radon likely is released to outdoor air before reaching the home faucets. Compared to radon entering homes through soil, radon entering through well water is generally a small source of risk. Call EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline for additional water safety information: 800-426-4791.

What Health Effects are Associated with Exposure to Indoor Radon?

When radon decays within your lungs it releases energy that can damage lung tissue and lead to lung cancer over the course of your lifetime. Not everyone exposed to elevated levels of radon will develop lung cancer. Your chances of getting lung cancer from radon depend mostly on:

- how much radon is in your home
- the amount of time you spend in your home
- whether you are a smoker or have ever smoked

According to the EPA, radon causes an estimated 7,000 to 30,000 lung cancer deaths in the United States per year. Lung cancer rates in Fairfax County are among the lowest in Virginia, according to data from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH).

What Can Fairfax County Residents Do?

Test your home's indoor air for radon. Test kits are available at most home centers. If the air in your home has an elevated level of radon, there are mitigation remedies available. For more information on radon, visit the Fairfax County Health Department's Web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd or call the radon hotline at 703-246-2541.

"Healthy People in Healthy Communities"

10777 Main Street, Suite 203, Fairfax, VA 22030

Main: 703/246-2435 Fax: 703/273-0825 TTY: 703/591-6435